Characters

Speaker

Scene 1: Bocas: A Daughter's Geography

SPEAKER
i have a daughter/ mozambique
i have a son/ angola
our twins
salvador & johannesburg/ cannot speak
the same language
but we fight the same old men/ in the new world
we are so hungry for the morning
we're trying to feed our children the sun
but a long time ago/ we boarded ships/ locked in
depths of seas our spirits/ kisst the earth
on the atlantic side of nicaragua costa rica
our lips traced the edges of cuba puerto rico
charleston & savannah/ in haiti
we embraced &
made children of the new world
but old men spit on us/ shackled our limbs
but for a minute
our cries are the panama canal/ the yucatan
we poured thru more sea/ more ships/ to manila
ah ha we're back again
everybody in manila awready speaks spanish
the old men sent for the archbishop of canterbury
"can whole continents be excommunicated?"
"what wd happen to the children?"
"wd their allegiance slip over the edge?"
"dont worry bout lumumba/ don't even think bout
ho chi minh/ the dead cant procreate"
so say the old men
but i have a daughter/ la habana
i have a son/ guyana
our twins
santiago & brixton/ cannot speak
the same language
yet we fight the same old men
the ones who think helicopters rhyme with hunger
who think patrol boats can confiscate a people
the ones whose dreams are full of none of our
children
they see mae west & harlow in whittled white cafes
near managua/ listening to primitive rhythms in
jungles near pétionville
with bejeweled benign natives
ice skating in abidjan
unaware of the rest of us in chicago

all the dark urchins
rounding out the globe/ primitively whispering
the earth is not flat old men
there is no edge
no end to the new world
cuz i have a daughter/ trinidad
i have a son/ san juan
our twins
capetown & palestine/ cannot speak the same
language/ but we fight the same old men
the same men who thought the earth waz flat
go on over the edge/ go on over the edge old men
you'll see us in launda. or the rest of us
in chicago
rounding out the morning/
we are feeding our children the sun

Scene 2: Tween Itaparica & Itapua

itaparica is where doña flor
took her two husbands/ itaparica is where
giorgio dos santos is nine years fulla mosquito bites
& will die soon
itaparica is not near corcuvado

cristo redentor

nor the/ copacabana
where the children eat off the plates of tourists/
anything/ no
itaparica is not close to rocinha
behind the sheraton/ covered with tin, stolen
bricks & women's stooped shoulders
i know rocinha's the only favela
with a legal city sign:
Ipanema
Leme
Copacabana
Rocinha
& a real city bus/ past the churrascurias of mud
in cidade dos santos/ the city of saints
thru gamblers of liberdade/ the barrio of liberty
the children of manguera comin back with hands fulla
rice/ thrown off chicken bones . . .
this is not close to itaparica
itaparica is an island/ near salvador
where my mother sat on a cannon
that usedta guard slave ships comin to the New World
ao mundo novo/ my father got his 17th century feet back
walkin on hot cobblestones
some bahiano laid in this heat
bahiano africano pretu moreno mulatto

some one of us laid this/ we are walkin/
it is still hot round the curve of our heels
itaparica where service is such an industry aos garçoms
take their time/ there is no where else/
itaparica is an island
a half-day's sail from salvador
one half-hour of itapuã
where the old man fries fish & counts money in his favor
his children row boats like in mindanao
like in mindanao/ they have forgotten
nothing
itapuã with a church on the highest hill
like land houses in curaçao
the safest place for slave owners
on crests of waves of slaves
who cd not move without being seen
our lady of lourdes in jurujuba
collects crutches & back braces
itapuã collects tourists
throws them back to the sea
under the gaze of the master of christ's house/
tween itaparica & itapuã
i found a calm
a rinsing off of history too grimy
a washing away of memories not fit for sleep
a burnin salted cleansing
i sailed/ i sailed on a schooner
smelling of fish/ whiskey & sweat
i sailed to a samba
slept with the sea in a fit of petulance
consorted with winds rough as avenue ‘c’
you climbed from those stars
tween itaparica & itapuã
you sat up in the sky/ began to strut around
yr legs swept thru the night/ you took the
half-moon in yr hands/ twirled her
a pinwheel/ for me
you settled on a armful of stars
took me to a harbor
some visions slip outta trees
others stalk the lakes inland
others leap from the glory of the sun
you stood up in the night/ yr palms pushing stars
to fall in delirium/ letting me know
all i see is true
we are as impregnable as night/ as dangerous
i sailed to a samba
tween itaparica & itapuã
you walked across the sky
to give me safe harbor
i slept with the sea in a fit of petulance

you climbed from the stars
in yr new straw hat
tween itaparica & itapuã

Scene 3: You Are Sucha Fool

you are sucha fool/ i haveta love you
you decide to give me a poem/ intent on it/ actually
you pull/ kiss me from 125th to 72nd street/ on
the east side/ no less
you are sucha fool/ you gonna give me/ the poet/
the poem
insistin on proletarian images/ we buy okra/
3 lbs for $1/ & a pair of 98¢ shoes
we kiss
we wrestle
you make sure at east 110th street/ we have cognac
no beer all day
you are sucha fool/ you fall over my day like
a wash of azure
you take my tongue outta my mouth/
make me say foolish things
you take my tongue outta my mouth/ lay it on yr skin
like the dew between my legs
on this the first day of silver balloons
& lil girl's braids undone
friendly savage skulls on bikes/ wish me good-day
you speak spanish like a german & ask puerto rican
marketmen on lexington if they are foreigners
oh you are sucha fool/ i cant help but love you
maybe it was something in the air
our memories
our first walk
our first . . .
yes/ alla that
where you poured wine down my throat in rooms
poets i dreamed abt seduced sound & made history/
you make me feel like a cheetah
a gazelle/ something fast & beautiful
you make me remember my animal sounds/
so while i am an antelope
ocelot & serpent speaking in tongues
my body loosens for/ you
you decide to give me the poem
you wet yr fingers/ lay it to my lips
that i might write some more abt you/
how you come into me
the way the blues jumps outta b˙b˙ king/ how
david murray assaults a moon & takes her home/
like dyanne harvey invades the wind
oh you/ you are sucha fool/
you want me to write some more abt you

how you come into me like a rollercoaster in a
dip that swings
leaving me shattered/ glistening/ rich/ screeching
& fully clothed
you set me up to fall into yr dreams
like the sub-saharan animal i am/ in all this heat
wanting to be still
to be still with you
in the shadows
all those buildings
all those people/ celebrating/ sunlight & love/ you
you are sucha fool/ you spend all day piling up images
locations/ morsels of daydreams/ to give me a poem

just smile/ i'll get it

Scene 4: Oh, I'm Ten Months Pregnant

i tried to tell the doctor
i really tried to tell her
tween the urine test & the internal exam/
when her fingers were circling my swollen cervix
i tried
to tell her the baby was confused
the baby doesnt know
she's not another poem.
you see/ i was working on a major piece of fiction
at the time of conception
"doctor/ are you listening?"
had just sent 4 poems off to the *new yorker*
& was copy-editing a collection of plays
during those "formative first twelve weeks"
there were numerous opening parties
all of which involved me & altered the poor baby's
amniotic bliss/
"doctor/ the baby doesnt think she shd
come out that way!"
i mean/ she thinks she shd come up/ not down
into the ground/ she thinks her mother makes up things
nice things ugly things but made up things nonetheless
unprovable irrational subjective fantastic things
not subject to objective or clinical investigation/
she believes the uterine cave is a metaphor
"doctor/ you have to help me"
this baby wants to jump out of my mouth
at a reading someplace/
the baby's refusing to come out/ down
she wants to come out a spoken word
& i have no way to reach her/she is
no mere choice of words/how can i convince her
to drop her head & take on the world like the rest of us
she cant move up till she comes out

"whatever shall i do? I've been pregnant
a long time"
i finally figured out what to say
to this literary die-hard of a child of mine
"you are an imperative my dear"/ & i felt her startle
toward my left ovary then I said/ "as an imperative
it is incumbent upon you to present yrself"

Scene 5: A Black Night in Haiti, Palais National, Port-au-Prince

the sailor/ le marin/ tells me
"there is no violence in haiti.
jamaica has so many problems
the black people here are ‘la majorité.’ "
the children are begging
"lady give me something"
they make his heart sick
he sails yachts for italians hiding from the red brigade
he thinks i'm cute & exotic/ even
i think of brazilians/ on emancipation
sailing back to dahomey/ he sails yachts
from capetown to rio/ charters for the french
americans have so lil class
the begging children make his heart sick
dessalines/ are the women sleeping at yr feet
bothersome/ does yr marble horse smell their fatigue
the mensis & milk at noon
the old man with one leg/ one hand/ one
elbow/ does he offend yr
sensibilities
on these great marble horses
will you come again/ some one of you
sweep thru the alleys & the stink/ come here
with yr visions
la liberté. l'égalité. la fraternité.
come visit among us that we might know
again/ some hope
port-au-prince is a rough town
le boulevard jean-jacques dessalines
a desecration/ *les haitiennes* paint
like niggahs in philadelphia love to dance/
all over the roads/ paradise jumps
from canvas/ to be sold to tourists/ to take abroad
pétion/ l'ouverture/ dessalines
on horseback/ will you ride back
thru here/ invoke those same spirits
you called on at the citadel/ there are half-naked
women sleeping at yr feet/ children begging under yr
bridled stallions/ what 3 horses wd balk at/ one black man
carries on his back/ his sweat falls into the streams
of blood/ the yng men spit up
on le boulevard jean-jacques dessalines

papa doc made it possible
duvalier hadda lotta ju ju hoodoo grisgris
weapons
duvalier insisted/ the black people
cd go everywhere
aux téâtres/ aux restaurants/ aux musées/ to hell
his son lights up le palais national like christmas
in new york/ every night
the secret police come out in their trucks/ to scour
nos voisins/ our neighborhoods
can you stand it?
can you stand it, dessalines?
can you stand it, pétion/ l'ouverture?
can you stand these children
with the red eyes & dacron brazzieres for sale?
do you believe all the prostitutes/ in la fiesta/ el barrio
are from santo domingo/ des vaches espagnoles?/ vacas
des vaches espagnoles?
now/ marius trésor is an international hero
he plays soccer & sleeps with a blonde
do you ride yr horses for him?
do you salute the deformed of port-au-prince
with yr plumed hats & swords?
what are you doing on those goddamned horses?
cant you see these old women hobbling abt
like mares abt to be shot/ leaning on fences
by the palais national where
jean-claude invokes the spirits & disgraces
le negre marron who awready ran away from slavery
in santo domingo/ to catch the tears
of these children/ who have so lil will
they dont even steal . . .
dessalines/ pétion/ l'ouverture
you must come back
start all over again
no one will move
personne ne bouge pas sans la puissance des dieux
vous les connaissez/ venez ici
tes enfants ne savent que la mort
tes femmes marchent avec la faim
tes hommes travaillent sans raison
tes vieux sont fatigués
what are you doing on those marble horses?
l'haiti a besoin
l'haiti a besoin/ de la liberté/ l'égalité/ fraternité.
l'haiti/ le premier pays au monde/ sans esclaves
l'haiti/la nation de l'indépendance noire
what is going on/ here?
où est dessalines/ maintenant?
où est pétion/ l'ouverture?
où sont-ils qui peuvent nous aider à la liberté

l'égalité/ la fraternité?
où sont-ils maintenant/ l'haiti a besoin
where are you now?
haiti's in need . . .

Scene 6: Some Men

i.

some/ men
dont know anything abt that
the manliness inherent at birth
is lost as they grow or shrink
to size
some/ men
dont know that a well dressed man
is a good female impersonator
that machines replace them & do a better job
some/ men
have no language that doesn't hurt
a language that doesn't reduce what's whole
to some part of nothing
sometimes/ some men think
it's funny/ really funny
women have anything to do with them

ii.

he was a pretty man who liked pretty things.
surrounded with beat-up luxuries/ old mantillas
from women's heads lay cross his mahogany tables/
bronze nymphs, bulbs in their mouths, lit up
his quarters/ onyx vases steadied scarlet tulips before
french windows he opened when he had espresso
in early morning.
he kept a dressing gown/ mauve dotted with black velvet.
he waxed his floors til they shone & covered them with
near eastern rugs/ the kind little girls spend whole
lives tying.
he walked about grandly.
though he was a little man/ he liked to think himself large.
he had so many pretty things.
he never bent his knees/ that added some inches
& kept him from looking anyone in the eye
there'd be nothing new in his visions. only
old pretty things/ used abused beauties
like the women who decorated his bed from time to time.
he sat them on old sheets & displayed the dusty
manuscripts he collected/ the vintage photographs
he stored/ the women past whose legs he'd pulled
over his hips like a holster.
now this was an honor

to lay naked with a pretty man among his pretty things/
the violated thrown-out pieces of lives he recovered
from rummages scavenging & gutters.
the beauty of it all
was it cost him so little. imagine him
so small a man getting away with all that.
nothing new. not a new thing.
what's to value in something unblemished?
porcelain must be cracked/ to covet. rugs frayed/
to desire. there must be scratches on the surfaces/
to enjoy what's beautiful.
he was really very tiny in the big brass bed.
the beauty of the woman overpowered him. she didn't
even seem afraid in the presence of all his
pretty things.
he thought of the most beautiful thing he cd say.
what words wd match his pretty little face.
what phrase approach the sunlight mad with joy
on the limbs of this woman next to him.
what he could do so perfectly.
he was a little man
& straightening his legs in the bed added nothing to
his stature. he sat up & crushed the frailty of the morning
"suck my dick & make some coffee"
he squealed.
she ran out
with no more than her coat/ her shoes in her hands
keys in her mouth. she thought she must have lost
her mind.
but
he was a small man
& cd handle only damaged goods. he sat in his big bed
with his little legs bent/ quite content.
now/ there was something someone else cd collect/
an abused/ used luxury/ a woman
with a memory of daybreak in a near perfect place/
sunlight warm against her face & a man squealing
suck my dick & make some coffee

SUCK MY DICK & MAKE SOME COFFEE

she always woke before her lovers/ after that.
she never slept near windows/ & the aroma of coffee
left her pale.
& he was a little man/ a pretty man
surrounded with beat-up luxuries/ creating blemishes
scratches fraying edges/ illusions
of filling the bed he slept in

iii.

it was best to call in the middle of the night.

women living alone are startled by noises at late hours.
it is best to ring twice & hang up.
then ring back/ say nothing.
women living alone are familiar with perversions.
he decided to ring twice & hang up three times.
he felt once she answered/ heard a man breathing/
she'd hang up quickly.
then
he cd call back & she'd be so glad
finally a man she knew
a man she cd trust in the middle of the night.

iv.

he said/ she had too much for her own good.
too much what/ she asked
everything/ he said
but what/ she asked
money/ he shouted/ too much money
yeah/ too much energy/ just too much/ you/
dont need all that. you should give it to me
i'm a man/ he said
she said nothing
he turned around.
his eyes sparkled when he told her what she really
needed to do was have a baby/ she needed
something to tie her ass down.

v.

there was nothing he could see in a woman that was
of any use at all. she was forever silly.
look at that mess you put on yr face/ why dont you
use kohl like algerian women/ why dont you cover
your face
everytime she'd try to do what pleased him/
he'd find a more indelicate failure.
what's wrong with your hair? dont you oil your legs?
why do you let your pussy hair grow so long/ cut if off!
get your teeth fixed/ sit over there &
take your pants off.
he liked pornographic still-lifes.
when he cdnt afford the quarter machine/ he invited women
to keep him company/ then he made them ugly.

vi.

he kept the space empty. so no one wd ever imagine
that a woman lived there/ which is what he wanted
for no one to know.
if she lived empty & angular as he did, she'd become
less a woman & part of the design/ where anything he

wanted to happen/ happened.

vii.

the baby gets up every hour & a half. she's a spunky
little baby who cries & smiles a lot. she needs to nurse
& her mama's right there. without sleep or no/ the milk flows.
he doesn't like that. he said.
there's no one taking care of me. he thought
her stitches shd heal faster. she shdn't take so
many sitz baths. she takes too long to walk from here to
there/ she doesnt actually haveta walk funny like that
it dont hurt her/ it wont hurt/ he said/ it wdnt hurt.
dont you remember before that damned baby? it was me.
it was me & you. there's always milk for the baby
none for me/ never too tired for the baby/ never too
tired for the baby/ he didn't understand
why she sat on the stairway crying all night with the
spunky little baby
he hadnt done nothing but hold her arms back/ & bite
on her titties/ how did he know his teeth wd hurt
how cd he know/ shit/ she always has time for the baby
what was he sposed to do/ the milk flows whether she tired
or not/ when was he gonna get some/ he said it wont hurt/
it wont hurt/ dont you remember . . .

viii.

he waited
til she got out of her car
& pulled his dick out exactly 6 ft
from her doorway.
the car was locked
the front door was locked
there was a man with his dick out
freezin winds
her hands trembling/ her mouth falling over her scalp
his laughter came all over her coat

ix.

he looked at the flowers on her window sill/
roses, lilacs, lilies & mums. the flowers
on her curtains/ blazing tropical petals
& stamen
her desk festooned with strange cacti & terrarium.
she had covered her ceilings in arcs of ivy/
made herself a garden full of soft round shapes/
fragrance & manners.
he felt her thighs/ strong & wet.
her body arching like ferns reaching/ she was smiling
& feverish with desire

strange sounds fell from her mouth
gurgling innocent hot sounds/ crept along his back
her fingers
sought out the hairs long his neck/
the evening fog laced kisses round their bodies/
she thought she heard piano solos/ she thought she heard
trumpets gone marvelously wild in nature's murmurings she felt him coming
& let go all her powers
when without warning
he shot all his semen up her ass she kept screaming

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WHAT ARE YOU DOING to me

he relaxed/ sighing
"i had to put it somewhere. it was
too good to be some pussy."

x.

some men would rather see us dead than imagine
what we think of them/
if we measure our silence by our pain
how could all the words
any word
ever catch us up
what is it
we cd call equal.

Scene 7: About Atlanta

cuz he's black & poor
he's disappeared
the name waz lost the games werent played
nobody tucks him in at night/ wipes traces
of cornbread & syrup from his fingers
the corners of his mouth
cuz he's black & poor/ he's not
just gone
disappeared one day
& his blood soaks up what's awready red
in atlanta
no ropes this time no tar & feathers
werent no parades of sheets fires & crosses
nothing/ no signs
empty bunkbeds
mothers who forget & cook too much on sundays
just gone/ disappeared
cuz he's black & poor he's gone
took a bus/ never heard from again
but somebody heard a child screaming
& went right on ahead
children disappearing/ somewhere in the woods/ decaying

just gone/ disappeared/ in atlanta
mothers are always at the window watching
caint nobody disappear right in fronta yr eyes
but who knows what we cd do
when we're black & poor
we aint here no way/ how cd we disappear?
who wd hear us screaming?
say it was a man with a badge & some candy
say it was a man with a badge & some money
say it was a maniac
cd be more n sticks n stones
gotta be more than stars n stripes
children caint play war when they in one.
caint make believe they dyin/ when they are
caint imagine what they'll be/ cuz they wont
just gone/ disappeared
oh mary dont you weep & dont you moan
oh mary dont you weep & dont you moan
HOLLAR i say HOLLAR
cuz we black & poor & we just disappear
we cant find em jesus cant find em
til they seepin in soil
father reekin in soil
they bones bout disappeared
they lives aint never been
bleeding where the earth's awready red
dyin cuz they took a bus
& mama caint see that far out her window
the front porch dont go from here to eternity
& they gone
just disappeared
but somebody heard them screaming
somebody crushed them children's bones
somebody's walkin who shd be crawling
for killing who aint never been
cuz we black & poor/ we just be gone
no matter how sweet/ no matter how quiet
just gone
be right back ma
going to the store mother dear
see ya later nana
call ya when i get there mama
& the soil runs red with our dead in atlanta
cuz somebody went right on ahead
crushing them lil bones/ strangling them frail wails
cuz we black & poor
our blood soaks up dirt
while we disappearing
mamas keep looking out the door
saying "i wonder where is my child/ i wonder
where is my child"

she dont turn the bed back cuz she knows
we black & poor
& we just disappear/ be gone
oh mary dont you weep & dont you moan
oh mary dont you weep & dont you moan
i wonder where is my child
i wonder where is my child
nothing/ no signs
in atlanta

Scene 8: Hijo de las Americas

i must go to La Costa/ on the Atlantic side/
where the English left Nicaragua black & poor.
carlos, cherry brown, in a afro/ keeps us
up in the night under Sandino's light/ reading
poems recovered from the war/ small pieces of paper
left at someone's house/ small typed pages that cd fit
in his shoe/ Somoza *jailed* poets *killed* poets *maimed* poets.
there is something from the war / still
hurting carlito's leg/ he cannot stand in line for his lunch
he reads all night of the black coal-miners gold-miners
choking on dust/ having no future that is not
another black hole in the ground.
carlos reads the poems he can/ the rest
were *burned* by friends/ when the security police
la guardia nacional/ came looking for a free black
mind/ *burned* poems cannot return/ we must
fix carlito's leg/ he must be able to stand up/
when he poets his black black language/
the raggae of *america libre*
the hot side of the new way/ the bottom of the future/
does have rhythm/ *el ritmo*
i must remember to remind my poet friends in America /
to keep matches in their houses/ i must remember that everywhere
nothing can be taken for granted/
not yr thoughts. not yr beliefs.
they go with you/
or you burn them behind you/
Criminal/ huh? to watch fire eat love of what you come from/
what you want/ Necessary for the children/
we can always remember/ but if we burn with the poems/ who
shall tell the children/ why
el salvador

Scene 9: We Need a God Who Bleeds Now

we need a god who bleeds now
a god whose wounds are not
some small male vengeance
some pitiful concession to humility
a desert swept with dryin marrow in honor of the lord
we need a god who bleeds

spreads her lunar vulva & showers us in shades of scarlet
thick & warm like the breath of her
our mothers tearing to let us in
this place breaks open
like our mothers bleeding
the planet is heaving mourning our ignorance
the moon tugs the seas
to hold her/ to hold her
embrace swelling hills/ i am
not wounded i am bleeding to life
we need a god who bleeds now
whose wounds are not the end of anything

Scene 10: New World Coro

our language is tactile
colored & wet
our tongues speak
these words
we dance
these words
sing em like we mean it/
do it to em stuff drag punch & cruise it
to em/ live it/ the poem/
our visions are our own
our truth no less violent than necessary
to make
our daughters' dreams
as real as mensis
&
the earth hums some song of her own . . .
cuz
we have a daughter/ mozambique
we have a son/ angola
our twins
salvador & johannesburg/ cannot speak
the same language
but we fight the same old men/ in the new world
we are so hungry for the morning
we're trying to feed our children the sun
but a long time ago/ we boarded ships/ locked in
depths of seas our spirits/ kisst the earth
on the atlantic side of nicaragua costa rica
our lips traced the edges of cuba puerto rico
charleston & savannah/ in haiti
we embraced &
made children of the new world
but old men spit on us/ shackled our limbs
old men spit on us/shackled our limbs
for but a minute . . .
you'll see us in luanda or the rest of us in chicago.

END OF PLAY.